

GREUZE



MASTERPIECES IN COLOUR

To —
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MASTERPIECES
IN COLOUR
EDITED BY - -
T. LEMAN HARE

GREUZE

1725-1805

"MASTERPIECES IN COLOUR" SERIES

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Others in Preparation.

PLATE I.—L'ACCORDÉE DU VILLAGE. (Frontispiece)

This picture, at first entitled "A Father handing over the Marriage-portion of his Daughter," then "The Village Bride," is the best of Greuze's subject pictures. The scene is more or less naturally arranged, and informed with the tender homely sentiment inspired by the subject; and the bride, with her fresh young face and modest attitude, is a delicious figure. It was exhibited in the Salon of 1761, and now hangs in the Louvre.



GREUZE

BY ALYS EYRE MACKLIN
ILLUSTRATED WITH EIGHT
REPRODUCTIONS IN COLOUR



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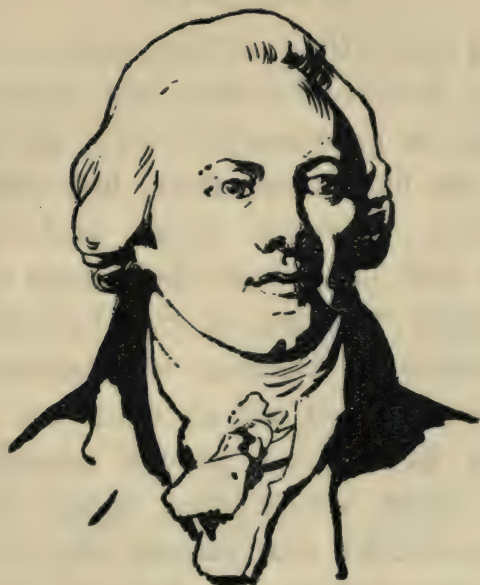
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CHAPTER I

EARLY DAYS AND FIRST SUCCESS

FEW names suggest so much beauty as that of Greuze.

“Greuze”—“a Greuze”—you have only to hear the word and there rises before your mental vision a radiant procession of maidens each lovelier than the last, with the blue of

a spring sky in their shining eyes, rosy blood flushing delicate cheeks, soft silken hair escaping in gold-touched curls at temples where the blue veins show, lips like dewy carnations, rounded necks and curving bosoms that suggest all the sweets of June. A veritable "garden of girls" in the first fresh bloom of budding womanhood; and they come to you not so much as painted pictures as delicate visions breathed on canvas from which they might at any moment tremble into pulsing life.

Yet the Greuze to whom we owe this exquisite series was first known as the painter of pictures of a very different kind. Before speaking of these let us begin at the beginning, by seeing when and under what conditions the child who was to become the poet-painter of a certain type of womanhood first saw the world he was destined to enrich.

Born at Tournus, a little town near Macon

**PLATE II.—L'INNOCENCE TENANT DEUX
PIGEONS**

"L'Innocence tenant deux Pigeons," or "Innocence holding two Pigeons," is a typical example of the eyes Greuze never tired of painting, large innocent orbs with a sparkle that suggests the morning sun on flowers wet with dew. The moist half-open lips you also find in most of his girl-heads. The lovely colour scheme is particularly happy even for Greuze. The original is in the Wallace Collection, London.



in France, on August 21, 1725, the early life of Jean Baptiste Greuze curiously resembles in its broad lines those of many other well-known artists. His parents were humble people who lived in the tiny house at Tournus, now decorated with a commemorative plaque; the father an overman slater; and the god-parents, who play such an important part in the life of the French child, respectively a slater and a baker. The father seems to have been ambitious, for he resolved to take his son into an evidently expanding business, not as a workman, but as architect. At the usual early age, however, the child's vocation declared itself. It was in vain the father, alarmed by symptoms that threatened to disarrange his plans, took materials from him and then whipped him for making pictures all over the walls—anywhere, everywhere. The boy cared for nothing but drawing of a kind that did not fall in with the cherished architectural idea, and after many struggles

he won the day by giving his father for a birthday present a pen-and-ink drawing of the head of St. James, well enough done to be at first mistaken for an engraving. This had been copied at nights when he was supposed to be asleep, and touched and convinced, the father finally gave in and sent him off to Lyons to learn the business in the studio of the painter Grandon.

The term "learn the business" is used advisedly. Grandon's studio was more a manufactory of pictures than anything else, and was just as bad a school as a young artist could well have. Pictures were copied, re-copied, and adapted, turned out for all the world as Jean Baptiste's godmother turned the loaves out of her oven; and while the boy learnt the use of colours, and some drawing, he also learnt that facility which is the deadly enemy of art, artifice rather than invention, to copy rather than to create—weaknesses which beset him ever afterwards.

It was natural that, when manhood was arrived at, Greuze should yield to the inevitable law that draws exceptional talent to great centres. When he was about twenty he left Lyons, and with very little capital but his abilities, his blonde beauty, and a large stock of self-satisfaction, he set out gaily to make his fortune in Paris.

The story of the first ten years there is also the conventional one of early artist days, the old tale of stress and struggle, of bitter disappointments alternating with brilliant hopes and small achievements. Young Greuze was too personal and faulty in his work to please the Academy, not strong enough yet to convince any advanced movement there might be, and he divided ten trying years between a little study at the Academy and a great deal of painting the pot-boilers he had learnt to make at Lyons. At last his work attracted the attention and gained for him the friendship of two well-known artists, Sylvestre,

and Pigalle, the King's sculptor, and they were instrumental in his being able to exhibit in the Academy of 1755, when he was thirty years old, the picture which brought him his first success, "Un Père qui lit la Bible à ses Enfants."

This picture shows the living room of a raftered cottage, with the old father sitting at a table round which are gathered his six sons and daughters. One of his large, horny hands is on the open Bible before him, the other holds the spectacles he has taken off as he stops to explain the passage he has been reading. The children listen respectfully, some attentively, the others with an air of being absorbed in their own reflections, while the mother, sitting near, stops her spinning to tell the baby on the floor not to tease the dog.

It is not well painted. Except that it shows a picturesque interior and expresses the sentiment of piety in the home it is

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intended to convey, it has but little merit, is, indeed, so mediocre that you wonder why, far from bringing fame to the young man, it should have been noticed at all.

To understand its success, and the still greater success of similar pictures which followed, you must glance at the epoch of its production.

CHAPTER II

THE TIMES IN WHICH GREUZE LIVED

IT was that period of the eighteenth century before the Revolution when society was at its worst, the paints and powders that covered its face, the scents which overperfumed its body, its manners artificial as the antics of marionettes, being emblematic of its state of mind. Society was, in short, so corrupt it could not become any more so, and at length, weary of the search for a new sensation, there was nothing for it but a sudden rebound to some sort of morality.

Opportunist philosophers appeared quickly on the scene, and began to preach the pleasant doctrine that man was born very good, full of honesty and good feeling, running over

with generosity and all the virtues, and if he did not keep so, it was because the miserable conventions of society had drawn him from the original perfection of his state. To find virtue you must look among those of humble estate, the poor who thought of nothing but their work and the bringing up of their large families. Away, then, from social life and its corruptions, return to the simple ways of the lowly and needy—thus and thus only could France be regenerated !

The aristocratic victims of their caste drank all this in eagerly, and their exaggerated efforts to follow the new cult of simplicity made the bitter-tongued Voltaire describe them as “mad with the desire to walk on their hands and feet, so as to imitate as nearly as possible their virtuous ancestors of the woods.”

Diderot, whose sudden burning enthusiasms and throbbing eloquence would have carried away his hearers in spite of them-

selves if they had not been only too eager to listen, was the great apostle of the new doctrine, and, always in extremes, he boldly dragged his moral theories into even the realm of art.

"To render virtue charming and vice odious ought to be the object of every honest man who wields a pen, a paint-brush, or the sculptor's chisel," he declared.

The vivid intelligence of Greuze seized the position, and sure of at least attracting attention if nothing else, he set to work to paint some scene which would fall in with the prevalent "debauch of morals," as some one called it. Thus, "*Le Père qui lit la Bible à ses Enfants*" appeared at that psychological moment which does so much to ensure success. Further, it came as a refreshing change to a public weary of the pleasant insipidities of Boucher, of a long-continued series of pale pastorals showing the doubtful pleasures of light love. It was,

PLATE III.—LA MALÉDICTION PATERNELLE

"La Malédiction paternelle," or "The Father's Curse," is in the Louvre, and is one of the best known of Greuze's moral pictures. It is one of his worst productions. Observe the theatrical attitudes and gestures, the too carefully arranged draperies, etc., of the actors in this exaggerated scene, which in real life would pass in formless disorder and rough confusion.



moreover, a novelty, for no one had painted such subjects before in France.

And so more than the expected happened. From the day of its exhibition till the Salon was closed, it was surrounded by admiring crowds, and every one said, "Who is this wonderful Greuze?" Those there were who replied that Greuze had not painted the picture himself, was incapable of such work, for the overweening personal vanity that marred Greuze's character had already made for him many enemies; but the happy preacher-painter proved his position, and but gained additional interest from the discussions that raged round him.

From this moment Greuze's position was assured. He was made *agrée* of the Academy, which among other privileges gave him the right to exhibit what he liked there in future. He sold the celebrated picture for a comparatively large sum to a Monsieur de la Live de Jully. He made hosts of friends,

many of them influential. One of his new acquaintances offered to provide him with a studio. Another, l'Abbé Gougenot, invited him to accompany him to Italy to study art, an offer which was accepted.

Greuze stayed two years in Italy, but except that some of his pictures have Italian names and show Italian costumes, this visit exercised no perceptible influence on his work, and in 1757 he returned to steady work in the Paris which was to be for him the scene of so many triumphs—and later, of so much despair.

CHAPTER III

GREUZE'S MORAL PICTURES

THE well-known "Village Bride," or "L'Accordée du Village," exhibited in 1761, was his second great success.

"A Father handing over the Marriage-portion of his Daughter" was the first title of this picture, and one which better, if less poetically, explains the scene. The homely ceremony takes place in the picturesque living room of a big cottage or small farm, and twelve people take part in it. Backed up by the village functionary, who has drawn up the contract, the old father is evidently giving some good advice as he places the bag of money in the hands of his future son-in-law. The young man listens respectfully, the shy but proud young bride hanging on to

his arm. The mother has taken one of her daughter's hands, while a younger sister leans her head on the bride's shoulder. Children play about in various attitudes among a family of fowls who feed in the foreground. Though it has some of the faults of those which followed it, this is undoubtedly the best subject-picture painted by Greuze. The composition is good, it is well drawn, full of a charming tender sentiment, and the head of the fiancée, foreshadowing Greuze's future successes, is delicious, fully deserving Gautier's eulogy: "It is impossible to find anything younger, fresher, more innocent, and more coquettishly virginal, if the two words may be connected, than this head."

Preaching the beauty of family life, the sacredness of marriage, and the virtues and happiness of the humble, "*L'Accordée du Village*" raised a furore. Its material success was equally great. It was sold for 9000

livres, and later, in 1780, it was bought for the Cabinet du Roi for 16,650 livres.

Very much less successful from the artistic point of view were the two well-known pictures now in the Louvre, which appeared three or four years later, "*La Malédiction paternelle*" and—a sequel—"Le Fils puni."

The first shows the vicious and debauched son trying to tear himself from the grasp of an agonised mother and little brother, to go away with the colour-sergeant who is waiting near the door. While the mother pleads, the father, unable to move from the chair in which illness holds him, storms, and with hands violently outstretched, pronounces the curse that terrifies the other shuddering members of the family.

The punishment is shown in the second picture, when the repentant son, shabby and travel-stained, returns to find his father dead. His stick fallen from his trembling hands, his knees giving way beneath him, one hand on

his heart, the other pressed convulsively to his forehead, he stands helpless at the foot of the bed on which the dead man lies. Beside him stands his mother, pointing tragically to the corpse, with an air of saying, "Behold your work!" The other members of the family are too occupied with their own sorrow to notice him, and give way to their despair in various attitudes.

The artificiality of pose and gesture more than suggested in "*L'Accordée du Village*" is here exaggerated into cheap theatricalness. In "*Le Fils puni*," for example, the attitude of the Prodigal, and the Lady Macbeth pose of the classically-draped mother, are impossible, and the outstretched arms, the heaven-turned eyes, and open mouths of the others are almost offensive. This exaggeration defeats its own object. You feel that these *dramatis personæ* are only posing, *tableau-vivant* fashion, to impress, and they do not do it well enough to excite anything but

criticism in you. The colour is bad, heavy, and dull. The draperies hang in stiff folds, without suppleness.

These two canvases are arrangements, not pictures; and in spite of certain gracious qualities which always charm in Greuze, all the others of the long series that followed can be dismissed with the same criticism.

Such was not the opinion of Diderot, the painter's most admiring critic and friend. He could not find words in which to adequately praise productions that proved such "great qualities of the heart, and such good morals."

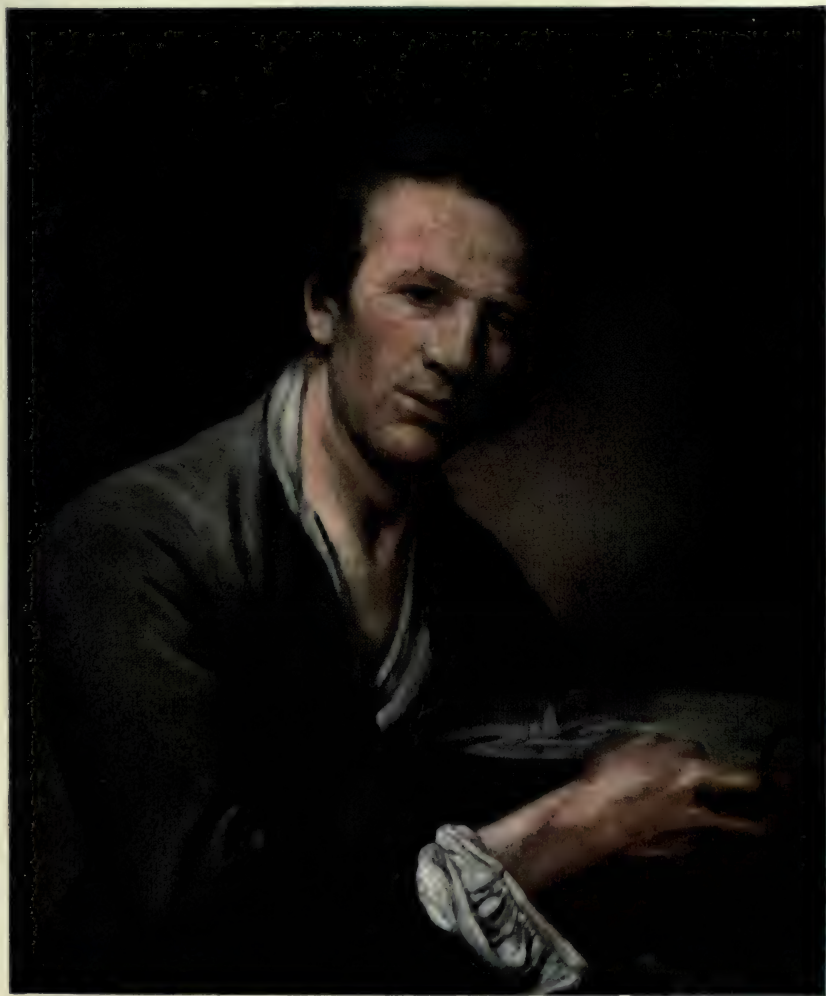
"Beautiful! Very beautiful! Sublime! Courage, my friend Greuze; continue always to paint such subjects, so that when you come to die there will be nothing you have painted you can recall without pleasure."

"Le Paralytique, ou la Piete filiale," "Le Fruit d'une bonne Education," now in the celebrated Hermitage Gallery in Russia,

"La Bénédiction paternelle," are further examples of this series of the ten commandments turned badly into paint and canvas, and less interesting still are subjects of the order of "The Torn Will," falling, as they do, into the form of the cheapest melodrama.

PLATE IV.—PORTRAIT D'HOMME

A very good example of Greuze as a portraitist. This picture is in the Louvre, and is remarkable for its delicate harmonious colouring and the living expression in the eyes. The man seems to be listening to some one, and on the point of opening his mouth to reply.



CHAPTER IV

THE PICTURES BY WHICH WE KNOW GREUZE

FROM time to time during these years Greuze had painted children's heads that gave evidence of the real character of his talent, and in 1765, the year of "*La Malédiction paternelle*," he produced "*Le Baiser envoyé*," now in London in the collection of the Baron Alfred de Rothschild.

"*Le Baiser envoyé*," or "*The Kiss*," represents a young woman leaning forward among the flowers of her window-sill to throw a kiss to her departing lover. The beautiful form, the charming curved face, all instinctive with tenderness and longing, the grace of the attitude, the tapering fingers, the arrangement of the framing draperies, combine to

make this one of the most exquisitely graceful of his pictures, and one that would alone have proved his surpassing talent for portraying a certain type of woman. No wonder the charmed beholders turned to ask each other whether this moral painter was not at his best when his subjects were not moral!

Of course there is nothing immoral about "The Kiss," only Greuze had been so praised for his preacher work, it was only natural he should be criticised when he produced "La Voluptueuse," as he first called this picture. Of the appropriateness of the title there can be no doubt. The lovely kiss-thrower absolutely respires voluptuousness; moreover, there is hardly a female figure of Greuze, except those showing very early childhood, that does not suggest this characteristic. Even when the eyes of his very young girls are candid and clear with innocence, the pouting lips of the half-opened mouths are

sensuous, the swelling bosom and rounded throat suggestive, the attitude provoking. In short, the impression given, if wholly seductive, is invariably complex, troubled, full of a certain delicate corruption—see “Innocence” or “Fidelity” in the Wallace Collection in London. “A moralist with a passion for lovely shoulders, a preacher who wants to see and show the bosoms of young girls,” is how he has been described.

Not that any one cared. On the contrary, every one, moralists included, was libertine in the eighteenth century, and “*deshabillé et désir*” only stamped a painter as being the mirror of his times. So Greuze’s name took on still more lustre as his rosebuds grew into roses whose morning dew sparkled beneath the voluptuousness that began to bow their lovely heads. “Love-Dreams,” “Bacchantes,” “Desire,” “Flora,” “Volupté”—there is a host of canvases bearing similar titles; and there are many others with symbolic names

showing girls weeping sentimental griefs over emblematic objects, such as broken mirrors, dead birds, crushed flowers, broken eggs or jars, a kind of badinage that was the fashion then.

In a way, he had also great success with his numerous portraits. He never got beneath the surface, was not psychological enough to express the soul of his sitter, but the fleshy envelope he reproduced with skill. The pictures of his friends Pigalle and Sylvestre, and an excellent one of the engraver Wille, whose prints, advertisements, and praises did so much to extend the Greuze cult, are well known; and in the vogue that followed his first success, he received commissions to paint the Dauphin and other important personages. In spite of its dull colour, the portrait of the painter Jeurat, now in the Louvre, is an interesting piece of work, showing characterisation, the brilliant eyes giving the impression of a man

PLATE V.—L'OISEAU MORT

"L'Oiseau Mort," or "The Dead Bird," bequeathed by Baron Arthur de Rothschild to the Louvre, shows one of Greuze's most beautiful child-figures, a little girl who has just found her bird dead. You forget the mannered pose of the hands and arms, to admire their curves and dimples. The delicacy of the little grieving face is beyond praise, with the tears starting beneath the downcast lashes, and a mouth that seems to quiver under the stir of shadow that plays round it.



accustomed to observe closely and see most things. But naturally Greuze was at his best when he painted women. Very beautiful is the picture of the Marquise de Chauvelin, at present in the collection of Baron Alphonse de Rothschild, and some of his portraits of his wife justly caused a sensation.

To turn for a moment from the artist to the man, it goes without saying that one so sensitive to the beauty of woman must have been susceptible to her influence, and Greuze's numerous heart-histories are all the more interesting in that they are as creditable to his chivalry as they are romantic. His first *grande passion* was his boyish love for the wife of his master Grandon at Lyons, a woman with grown-up daughters. He nursed this adoration in silence, and it was one of the idol's daughters who afterwards told how she once surprised the love-sick youth passionately kissing one of her mother's shoes he had found under a table.

Later, when he went to Italy with l'Abbe Gougenot, there was a love story which in some of its details recalls the "Romeo and Juliet" legend. The lovely young daughter of the proud Duke for whom he was copying pictures fell in love with the artist, and declared her passion. The young man was equally enamoured, but realising the inequality of their situation he hesitated, and it was only after the lady pined, fell ill, and had secret meetings arranged by her old nurse, that he confessed that the love was mutual. A period of madness followed, the lady making plans to take the money her mother had left her and elope to Paris, where Greuze was to become a second Raphael; but his sense of honour triumphed, and to avoid temptation he feigned an illness which kept him away from the palace. He really did fall ill at last, but as soon as he was able to be up he fled, fearing to see the lady again. An agreeable, if unromantic sequel

to the history is a letter he received from the heroine some years later, thanking him for having behaved as he had done. She was now a contented wife and the mother of some beautiful children, she said, and she owed all her happiness to him!

Then there is the story of his devotion to his wife; but unfortunately that will be told later under a very different heading to that of "romance."

CHAPTER V

THE VANITY OF GREUZE

MENTION has already been made of the overweening vanity which was Greuze's most pronounced personal characteristic. He had, above all, the highest possible opinion of his own talent, and could not brook the slightest adverse criticism of his work.

Even when he first came to Paris and had not proved his abilities, he made enemies by stupid remarks like his reply to Natoire, who had suggested some alteration in a detail of one of his pictures. "Monsieur, you would be only too happy if you were able to do anything so good yourself." Later, when success had come and he was surrounded by admirers, the desire for praise became a mania, and he

fell into a violent passion if any one made a remark that suggested anything but flattery. A great friend of his, and one of his patrons, a Madame Geoffrin, at whose house he had met many of his most influential friends and kindest critics, said laughingly, and with truth, that there was a "*veritable fricassée d'enfants*" in "La Mère Bien-aimée." Some one repeated this to Greuze.

"How dare she venture to criticise a work of art," he cried violently. "Let her tremble with fear lest I immortalise her by painting her as a schoolmistress, with a whip in her hand and a face that will terrify all children living or to be born."

Under the influence of his infatuation for himself, he lost all sense of the proportion of things—witness the scene when the Dauphin, delighted with his own portrait, asked him to begin one of the Dauphine. The presence of the lady did not prevent Greuze, ordinarily well-mannered, and particularly so to women,

from replying shortly that he did not know how to paint heads of the kind, making reference to the paint and powder all society women wore at the time. Small wonder that thereafter royal favours were scarce, and he had to wait several years longer than was necessary for the *logement* in the Louvre to which his position entitled him.

This same trait played a prominent part in his historic quarrel with the Academy over his diploma picture. It was the rule for every member to present to the Academy on his election some representative work, but Greuze, satisfied that the honour was theirs, and that he was in a position to form his own precedent, let years go by without offering the expected *chef d'œuvre*. It was only when the delay had lasted fourteen years, and they wrote saying they would be obliged to forbid him to show his pictures in the Salon unless he fulfilled his obligation, that he conceded to the rule, and having replied

by a letter that was "a model of pride and impertinence," set to work on the picture.

Believing he could do any form of subject equally well, he chose a grandiloquent historical subject, a style absolutely unsuited to his limitations. "Septime Sévère reprochant à son fils Caracalla d'avoir attenté à sa vie dans les défilés d'Écosse, et lui disant, Si tu désires ma mort, ordonne à Papinien de me le donner" was its title; and if you look at it where it hangs skied in the Louvre above the violently outstretched arms of "La Malédiction paternelle," you see that it is a most faulty and insignificant production. The Academy could not refuse it, but they told him frankly what they thought of it.

"Monsieur," said the Director, calling him in from the room where he awaited the congratulations of the associates, whose approval he believed he had now fully earned, "the Academy receives you as *peintre de*

genre. It has taken into account your former productions, which are excellent, and has shut its eyes on this one, which is worthy neither of them nor you."

The disappointment of Greuze, who had counted on the dignity and material advantages conferred by the title of Historical Painter, can be imagined, but amazement and fury dominated. For days he could neither sleep nor eat; and he covered reams of paper in writing to the papers to prove by technical laws and logical arguments that the picture was not only good, but a masterpiece. But for once the adoring public remained unresponsive. The last straw was his friend Diderot's criticism, published in the usual way.

"The figure of Septime Sévère is ignoble in character. It has the dark, swarthy skin of a convict; its action is uncertain. It is badly drawn, it has the wrist broken; the distance from the neck to the breast-bone is

PLATE VI.—LES DEUX SŒURS

"Les Deux Sœurs," or "The Two Sisters," has been until recently in the private collection of Baron Arthur de Rothschild, who bequeathed it to the Louvre, where it now hangs. If it lacks some of the charm of Greuze's other pictures of girls, it possesses many of his most charming qualities—delicacy of colouring, graceful figures, appealing gesture. The arrangement of the scarves and draperies is essentially "Greuze."



exaggerated. Neither do you see the beginning of the right knee nor where it goes to beneath the covering of the bed. Caracalla is even more ignoble than his father, a wooden figure, without suppleness or movement. Those who force their talent do nothing with grace."

Having exhausted all other means of protest, Greuze took refuge in the sulkiness of a naughty child, and more or less independent now that he was at last to have the coveted *logement* in the Louvre, he declared he would never again send a picture to the Academy.

Nor did he, for when, years later, he was obliged to fall back on its aid, the Academy as he had known it was swallowed up in the whirlpool of the Revolution.

CHAPTER VI

"THE BROKEN PITCHER" AND OTHER WELL-KNOWN PICTURES

TO certain temperaments the associations of the Louvre are as interesting as the treasures it actually contains, and many a dreamer wandering through those superb galleries must have tried to reconstitute such scenes as the receptions held by Greuze when, at the height of his fame, he was at last in possession of the *logement* granted him "for life" by the King in March 1769.

He was now in the prime of life, and the village boy had evolved into a handsome man of middle height, with an impressive personality and air of distinction. One of

the two portraits of himself hanging now in the Louvre must have been painted about this period. It shows a fine head, full of energy, both mental and physical, delicate yet strong, very sensitive, the brilliant eyes deeply set, the whole face informed with something akin to, without being genius. The curved mouth is eloquent, and we are told his conversation was sincere, elevated, and animated; but much nervous irritability is indicated, and a physiognomist would point significantly to the exaggerated slope backwards of the otherwise fine forehead, suggesting a lack of that reflectiveness which turns keen perceptions and observation to the best account.

He was always perfectly dressed, his manners were elegant, and it soon grew to be the fashion to visit his studio. He used to show his pictures himself, explaining their beauties, and his extravagant re-

marks, absorbed as he was in himself and his work, sometimes provided more entertainment than the legitimate *raison d'être* of the visit. All the talent and beauty of Paris, the greatest nobles, royalties, and distinguished travellers were at one time or another his guests. In a characteristic letter to a friend, Madame Roland describes her visit to see "The Broken Pitcher" we all know so well by reproductions. The original is back in the Louvre now.

After speaking of the lovely colouring, fresh and charming, she says: "She holds the jar she has just broken in her arms, standing near the fountain where the accident has taken place. Her eyelids are low, and the mouth still half-open, as she tries to understand the gravity of her misfortune and does not know whether she is to blame. One can imagine nothing more piquant and pretty; the only reproach the painter merits

is that he has not made the little girl sorry enough to no longer feel the temptation to return to the fountain. I said this to Greuze, and we laughed together." With good-natured malice Madame Roland goes on to relate how when Greuze told her the Emperor Joseph II. had complimented him on the personal quality of his work, saying he was the poet of his pictures, she replied, "It is true one never quite understands how beautiful your pictures are till you describe them." A remark which Greuze took quite seriously.

The "Danaë," now in the Louvre, and "L'Offrande à l'Amour," in the Wallace Collection, are also mentioned in correspondence as having been shown by Greuze in his studio about this time. They are the best examples of his allegorical work—there was no branch of painting he did not attempt—but they are hardly more successful than his moral subjects, and quite

lack the charm of his homely, familiar scenes.

Chief among the latter may be mentioned "La paix du Ménage," a young father and mother clasping each other tenderly as they watch their sleeping child; "La Mère Bien-aimée," whose pretty head comes out of a crowd of the clambering children, who excited Madame Geoffrin's ill-received remark; "Le Gouter," a young mother feeding her two fat little boys with a spoon, while a cat sits on the table watching enviously; "Le Silence," in which the mother, nursing one child, tells an unhappy older one not to blow his trumpet in case he wakes the babe in the cradle. Greuze was never tired of painting mothers with their little children, and the picturesque interiors in which he places them are perhaps more charming than the figures, showing, as they do, the old-world utensils and objects he had round him in his own childhood. The oddly-

shaped cradle which he reproduced so often was that in which he himself had been rocked.

Very celebrated at the time were the companion pictures, "L'Enfant envoyé en Nourrice" and "Le Retour de Nourrice." The first scene is laid in the quaint courtyard of a little thatched farm, with all the family clustering round the mule on which the foster-mother is to carry away the baby. The composition is charming, with the foster-father arranging the saddle, the grandmother giving a last word of advice to the young nurse, the two little children afraid of the strange dog, and the mother giving a last kiss to the baby she would give much not to have to part with. The return of the baby, now a sturdy child on his feet, is set in the interior, where the little hero of the occasion struggles away from his eager mother and the brother who strives to amuse him, to return to the foster-mother. These

are the least affected of all the subject-pictures. With the exception of the foster-father, who stands in the second one with a cradle on his back and his eyes piously uplifted to the rafters, all the actors seem absorbed in what they are doing, and this sincerity accentuates the grace and sentiment which always informs Greuze's work.

Engravings of all these canvases, of all his work, were sent out in their thousands. He was well known in Germany and other countries, and his name was almost as familiar in the bourgeois homes of provincial France as in Paris.

Seeing him at this period of his career, the pet of princes, and earning vast sums of money, it is difficult to realise Greuze could ever have fallen on evil days, have come to actual want. Yet so it was to be.

The visit of the Emperor Joseph II. referred to by Madame Roland, and followed by a command for a picture, a present of 4000

PLATE VII.—LA CRUCHE CASSÉE

"La Cruche Cassée," or "The Broken Pitcher," is too well known in every form of reproduction to need description. It hangs in the Louvre, and is always surrounded by eager copyists, who strive, very frequently in vain, to reproduce the delicate tints of the flesh and the vague, wondering expression in the eyes of the charming heroine.



ducats, and the conferring of the title of baron on the painter, was the high-water mark in his career. And the tide of success was not only to turn, but to recede with tragic rapidity.

CHAPTER VII

RUIN AND DEATH

EVEN during these brilliant days, when Greuze was considered the most fortunate of mortals, there lurked beneath the glittering surface of his life a grim reality which made happiness impossible, the misery of a private life dominated by as bad a wife as ever cursed a man's existence.

She was a Mademoiselle Babuty, daughter of a bookseller on the Quai des Augustins, and entering the little shop to buy some books, Greuze became infatuated with her beauty. "White and slender as a lily, red as a rose," is how Diderot describes her, and though she was past thirty when Greuze made her acquaintance, she must have been a remarkably pretty woman, with a round,

smooth forehead, eyes full of *naïveté* beneath long shadowing lashes, small nose, moist lips, delicate complexion. A sentimental, coquettish air redeemed what would otherwise have been an inane expression. In the portraits under her own name, and several pictures for which she posed, such as "La Mère Bien-aimée" and "La Philosophie endormie," you see that if she was not the actual model, she was certainly the ideal that inspired most of Greuze's best work.

At first he had no intention of marrying her, and they had known each other two or three years before she practically compelled him to do so by threatening to kill herself if he did not make her his wife. It was a disastrous marriage. Lazy, greedy, extravagant, devoid of all moral sense, she soon got over the satisfaction the position of her husband gave her, and began to regard his work merely as a means to supply her caprices. When she had been married a few

years she sent her two little girls away to school, and going from bad to worse, ended by filling the house with vulgar men, who made Greuze ridiculous. Her business training fitted her to keep the monetary accounts of the family, and when at length her husband was obliged to look into them to try to account for the disappearance of vast sums of money, he found she had been squandering them on her dissolute friends. The extent of her audacity can be judged by her accounting for the disappearance of 100,000 livres by saying she had invested it in a ship which had gone down at sea, and she refused to give the name of the vessel or captain.

Of all that freedom of mind and internal peace so important to all successful work, but supremely so to the artist whose creations are to be strong, Greuze knew nothing. Petty discussions, foolish quarrels, then grievous wrongs and personal violences, made up the background of his life, and it is

astonishing that the trials of man and husband did not sap the strength of the artist. You would wonder why he supported it all so long did you not know that the artistic temperament finds the most important part of its life in its work, and falls an easy prey to imposition in most things outside it. Besides, at first he loved her very sincerely, and she was the mother of his two daughters. At length, when cartoons were printed ridiculing her lightness, and her husband for supporting it, and her behaviour was instrumental in his having to resign his *logement* in the Louvre, even Greuze's patience gave way, and in 1785 a deed of separation enabled him to get rid of her.

Considering the large sums commanded by his pictures—and it was said he painted one a day—and the vast sale of the engravings, it is unlikely, even with a vicious wife's extravagance, Greuze could ever have known want in the ordinary course of events.

But the terrible days of the Revolution were at hand. Bank after bank failed, and slowly but surely all his savings had vanished. With the fall of the monarchy, the annual pension of 1500 livres granted by the King for thirty-seven years of work in "an art he had exercised with success" went, and finally he was reduced to what he was producing as a means of living. But, alas, when from chaos anything like order arose, and Greuze, now grown old, sent to the Salon of the year VIII. seventeen works of the kind that had earned for him so much glory in the past, the new order of things knew him not. The risen David was the god of the moment, and at each new picture of his a little more scorn fell on those who had preceded him.

It was in vain that he wrote to the papers, calling attention, as of old, to the moral meaning of his work; in vain that he tried to fall in with new ideas and paint classical scenes like his "Ariadne at Naxos." Any

notice he received was worse than none, and two years before he died he was cruelly summed up by a critic who wrote: "Greuze is an old man inspired by Boucher, whom he followed. His colour is not true, his drawing poor." We hear of his receiving 175 francs for a picture that would formerly have brought him thousands of livres; we hear of his wearing shabby frayed clothes he could not afford to replace. Finally, there are pitiful letters, one asking for an advance on a picture ordered out of charity, another saying, "I am seventy-five years old, and have not a single order for a picture. I have nothing left but my talent and my courage."

In these days of bitter neglect and dire poverty Greuze's pride stood him in good stead. He seems to have worried more at the prospect of leaving his daughters unprovided for than because of his own privations, and till the last he kept the indomitable spirit that characterised him. "Who is king

to-day?" he would ask sarcastically, as he lay in bed waiting for the end.

"I am ready for the journey," he said to his friend Barthélemy, just before he died. "Good-bye. I shall expect you at my funeral. You will be all alone there, like the poor man's dog."

Worn out as much by the heavy weight of a dead reputation as by the years his robust country constitution enabled him to carry so lightly, he died on March 21, 1805. The humble funeral, followed by two persons, would have been tragic in its friendlessness but for the message of hope written on a wreath of Immortelles placed on his coffin by a weeping woman closely veiled in black.

"These flowers, offered by the most grateful of his pupils, are the emblem of his glory."

PLATE VIII.—LA LAITIÈRE

"La Laitière," or "The Milkmaid," may perhaps be given as quite the most representative of Greuze's works. The affected pose and simpering smile, the unsuitability and over-arrangement of the dress, are as characteristic of the painter as the perfect grace of the *ensemble*, the delicious coquetry of the attitude, the dimpled roundness of the form, and, above all, the sparkle in the clear eyes and the exquisite bloom of the flesh. The picture is in the Louvre.



CHAPTER VIII

THE ART OF GREUZE

WHEN you think of the important place held by Greuze before the Revolution in the art of the eighteenth century, above all, when you reflect on how, being long dead, he still speaks in accents of such beauty, his pictures, valued at vast sums, finding honoured places in the art treasure-houses of the world, it comes almost as a shock to consider how far from being a really great artist he was.

Absence of sincerity is his chief fault. We read he used to talk much and very eloquently about studying Nature, and had at one time a habit of wandering about the streets in search of subjects, that he used even to make sketches and studies on the

spot, but once home and at work on the composition of the picture, he evidently gave rein to the libertine imagination we know. In short, if he really Saw, he Interpreted his own way, and that way resulted in his eliminating all the Strength and most of the Truth. In the theatrical moral pictures, for example, it never seems to have occurred to him that each scene that would tell a story is composed of a whole series of emotions and gestures, and that to try to fix on one canvas a situation which of its nature must be mobile and composed of many changes, is to attempt the false as well as the impossible. Further, even taking him as Diderot's disciple, "a painter who studied with a literary man," he is grievously at fault, for the idea of life he conveys is that of a melodrama in which vice is invariably punished and virtue rewarded—and life is not thus.

He took liberties with Nature, too, when he supposedly copied his homely, familiar

scenes direct from life. His peasant women take on attitudes and smirk as they feed the carefully placed children; no sweeping or labour of any sort seems to soil the hands of the busiest housewife; clinging children never succeed in disarranging the garments or hair of the mothers and nurses. By no stretch of the imagination could you see his milkmaids delivering milk; his servants look like ladies "making believe." The attitudes of all his *dramatis personæ* are always affected, the *naïveté* of his girls and children mannered, their pathos conventional. Tears never redden their eyes; no emotion disarranges the kerchief carefully arranged to show more than is necessary of the throat and breast. And the head of a child of twelve is often placed on the throat and bosom of a girl of seventeen.

Except when he touches flesh his colour is rarely good, the scheme too grey, with undecided reds, dull violets, dirty blues, and

muddy foundations. The draperies are often badly painted, a fault which he explained by saying he purposely neglected them to give more value to the painting of the flesh.

Then there is his monotony. No painter ever copied himself with more constancy and indefatigability. He has but three or four types, and these he copies and recopies till you never want to see them again. The father is always the same venerable man, much too old to be the father of such young children; the mother does not vary; it is always the same child a size or two smaller or larger, as the case may be. Although he nominally gives to his girls and women a profession by labelling them washerwomen, knitters, philosophers, chesnut-sellers, kitchen wenches, and so forth, they all have the air of being members of one family, and striking likenesses at that. And one and all have the appearance of posing in light opera rather than of playing a part in life. The peasant

mothers of large families have that charming coquettishness which is the hall-mark of every female he painted. The picturesque interiors are equally wanting in variety.

It has been urged by Greuze's admirers that if he had been properly trained, or had at least been spared those early years in Grandon's picture-manufactory, had been less inclined to listen to flatteries and the advice of Diderot, who praised him for "not making his peasants coarse," he might have overcome his faults and developed the qualities of a Chardin. The reply to this is that anything touching on genius cannot be held in check or turned from its own full expansion, that it is more than likely that Greuze expressed all he had to say, and himself summed up his own limitations when he said, "Be piquant, if you cannot be true."

To turn to the much pleasanter theme of his good qualities, Greuze was an innovator. He was the first to go to humble life for

inspiration, and he brought into the painting of bourgeois subjects a distinct character till then seen only in historical scenes. He created in France the moral type of painting. On Sundays in the Louvre you still see those who do not understand the beauty of colour, line, and subtler poetry, and find utility the essential condition of all art, lingering admiringly before "La Malédiction paternelle" and "Le Fils puni"; and engravings of similar works are still cherished objects in many a home.

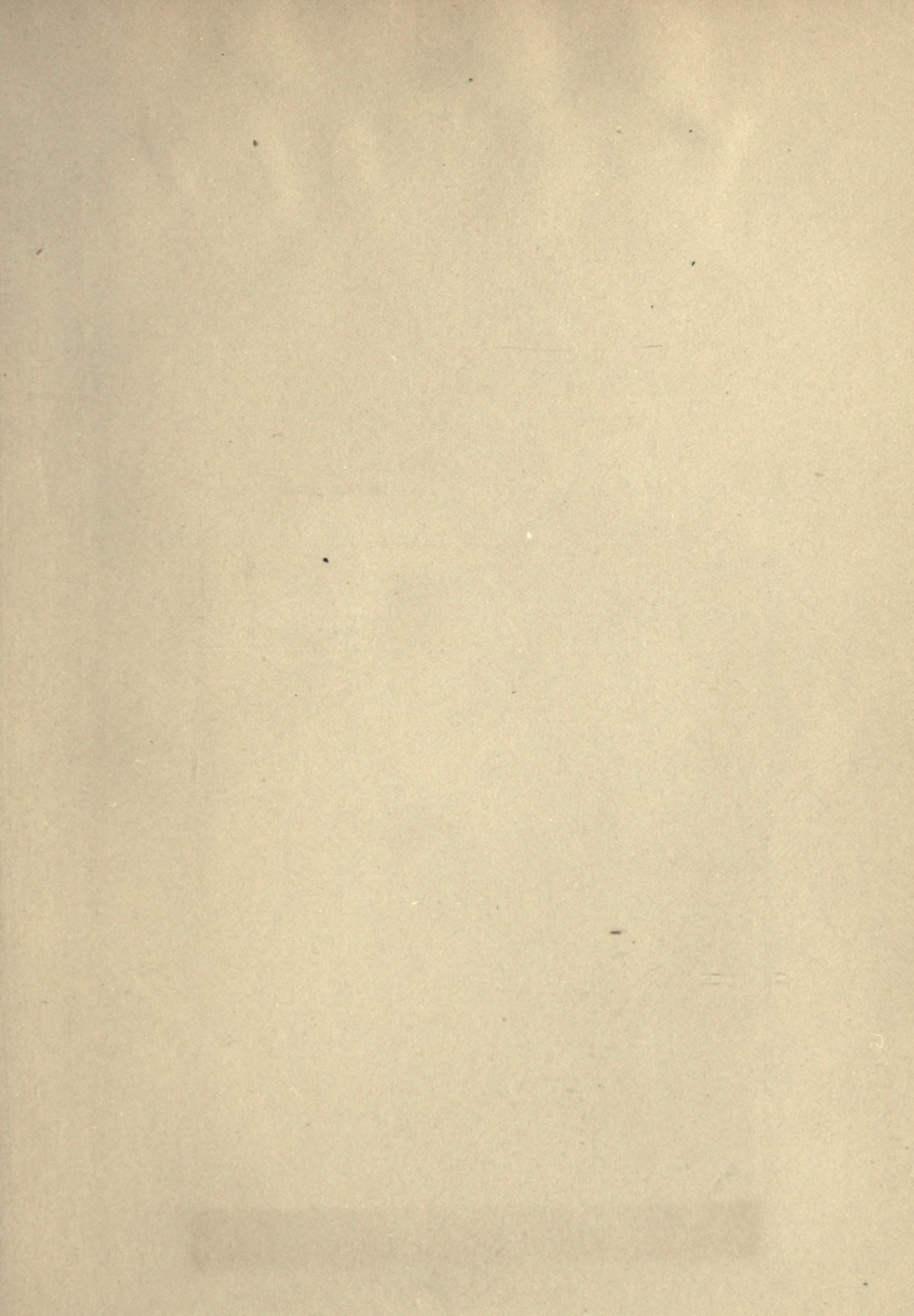
Valuable, too, is his quality of being documentary. He admirably interpreted his age with its superficiality running into theatricalness, its affectations of a morality which worshipped languor and voluptuousness under the name of "Innocence."

Last and best of all, there are the heads by which we know him. Merely clever in all else, Greuze rises above himself when he approaches these. Nothing could be fresher

or more lightly touched than the little blonde heads of his children, the fresh rose of their cheeks, the features suggested under the baby fat, the delicacy of the little unformed members set down with a tenderness that mocks at the limitations of pigments. The same rare quality of livingness animates the older heads. The eyes of the young girls have depth and flame, or their dewy sparkle is subdued in seductive languor. The face almost seems to tremble with emotion while a gleaming tear, a big wet drop, escapes from beneath the heavy lids. The nostrils quiver, the breath comes from between the half-opened mouth, the full lips seem to be making a movement forward. The white flesh is soft and warm, and rich life pulses delicately under the gauze-veiled bosom.

In short, mediocre in all other branches of painting, and affected and faulty at his best, in this exquisite series Greuze not only

proves that he possessed a very personal and poetic vision of his own, but that he had a glint of that "divine spark" which sets technique at naught, and results in the instinctive work of the inspired artist.



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